

ASHLEY KARST NATIONAL RECREATION AND GEOLOGIC AREA- PROTECTING UINTAH COUNTY'S WATERSHED

ASHLEY KARST NRG, WHAT IS IT?

The Ashley Karst National Recreation and Geologic Area (NRGA) is a specially designated recreation and water preservation area located entirely within the Ashley National Forest in Uintah County. The area was established by the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act (also known as the Dingell Act). The NRG will encompass approximately 173,475 acres of Uintah County's watershed on the Ashley National Forest.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY?

The Dingell Act states that the purpose of the NRG is "to conserve and protect the watershed, geological, recreational, wildlife, scenic, natural, cultural, and historic resources of the Recreation Area." Uintah County has taken several steps over the past few years to ensure that our water system is not compromised by unhealthy land-use practices. The county has engaged in water study projects, and even created a water protection zone entitled the Ashley Springs Protection Zone. Uintah County is served by a sensitive watershed on the south slopes of the Uintas, and this watershed must be protected. The NRG was designed to protect our precious headwaters and it encourages safe recreation practices in our beautiful forested mountains.

WHAT WILL BE CHANGING?

Land within the NRG will be subject to stricter land-use regulations, however most existing practices on the land will continue to be allowed. The following land-use practices are specifically mentioned in the Dingell Act:

MOTORIZED VEHICLES: motorized vehicles will be restricted to roads designated in the NRG'S management plan.

ROADS: No new permanent roads will be created within the NRG's boundaries. Maintenance of existing designated roads will be allowed. Road may be rerouted in order to protect public safety or to preserve important Recreation Area resources.

WINTER RECREATION: The use of over snow vehicles may continue.

WATER INFRASTRUCTURE: Authorized users may continue to access and operate water infrastructure and facilities, including Whiterocks Reservoir. The Dingell Act also preserves the right of authorized users and local governments to deliver water to the Ashley Valley if the karst system is damaged.

GRAZING: Grazing areas that were established prior to the enactment of the Dingell Act will be allowed to continue.

FISH AND WILDLIFE: The Dingell Act will not affect the jurisdiction of the State in regards to wildlife management.

MINING: The NRGa will not allow for mineral leasing, mining, or geothermal leasing.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT: Vegetation management practices, including fuels reduction practices, will be allowed to continue in order to reduce the risk of wildfire. Wildfires have the potential to have devastating impacts on underground karst water systems, which in turn could negatively impact Uintah County's access to clean water. The NRGa will allow for wildland fire treatment.

NON-FEDERAL LAND AND ACCESS: Non-federal land will not be affected by the NRGa designation, and access to non-federal land will be allowed to continue.

OUTFITTING AND GUIDE ACTIVITIES: Outfitting and guide services will be allowed to continue within the NRGa.

SUMMARY

The Ashley Karst National Recreation and Geologic Area will be a long-term benefit to the citizens of Uintah County. It is in the best interest of our communities to preserve and protect our sensitive water system while continuing to allow for unparalleled outdoor recreation activities. Over the next year the Forest Service—in consultation with Uintah County and affected Indian Tribes—will prepare a management plan that will help shape the future of the NRGa. It is Uintah County's hope that our citizens will attend public meetings and provide relevant comments as the Forest Service shapes the Ashley Karst National Recreation and Geologic Area.